



## COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

Virginia Department of Housing  
and Community Development

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### ***Residents in Wakefield receive access to public water and sewer service through volunteer efforts and Self-Help grant***

**Richmond, VA** – On Saturday, April 19, dozens of volunteers, residents, local officials from the Town of Wakefield, Sussex Service Authority and Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) staff gathered to celebrate the completion of the Birch Island Road Community Water and Sewer Project.

Residents of the Birch Island Road community, 70 percent of whom are low- to moderate- income, had additional cause for celebration – they helped construct the new service.

The project was funded through the Self-Help Virginia program, administered by the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development. Self-Help Virginia is an award winning program created to assist Virginia's rural localities in need of water and wastewater systems.

The program provides funds primarily for materials, project supervision, engineering and administrative costs.

What makes the program unique is that it requires community volunteers to do the majority of the labor, saving a minimum of 40 percent over conventional contracted wastewater projects. Through this approach, Self-Help Virginia is able to stretch limited funding in order to provide resources to more localities throughout the state.

"By providing the materials, water and sewer lines, Self-Help Virginia puts the power in the hands of the communities by using volunteers to install the systems," said DHCD Director Bill Shelton.

The Birch Island Road project was constructed for less than \$600,000, or 45 percent of the conventional cost estimate, saving approximately \$700,000.

"The residents of Birch Island Road will no longer have to drink water of poor quality from shallow wells on lots shared with septic tanks, many of which were failing due to poor soils and poor drainage conditions," said DHCD Program Manager Jimmy Wallace. "They can now enjoy drinking potable water from an approved water treatment facility and they will have their wastewater treated by an approved public wastewater treatment facility."

"This will improve the quality of life for these families immeasurably".

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Construction began on Sept. 18, 2007. Through the course of seven months, volunteers installed more than four miles of water and sewer lines and grinder pumps. Community volunteers also supported the laborers by providing meals and traffic control. In all, more than a dozen volunteers contributed hundreds of hours to the project.

Now the community will gather to celebrate the completion of the project which benefits more than 65 Birch Island residents. One key volunteer who will be recognized is Birch Island Road resident Norris Eley, who took the lead on the project – energizing, mobilizing, and guiding the community to a successful completion. In the Self-Help Virginia model, Eley is called a project “sparkplug.”

“The Town of Wakefield and Sussex Service Authority can without question say that this has been a complete success,” said Judy Harrington, project manager with the SSA. “The element involved first and foremost was the commitment of the community, the key player in this project.

“The volunteers were there each day striving to succeed and they are the ones who through diligence and hard work made this happen.”

Since its inception in 1998, some 40 Self-Help projects have taken place throughout Virginia, providing water and wastewater service to more than 1,300 homes, and benefitting more than 3,000 citizens. More than \$21 million of construction work has been completed for an actual cost of less than \$10 million.

The majority of projects take place in rural areas where the topography and distance from existing lines makes providing water and sewer service nearly impossible because of the expense.

“These same areas where water and wastewater service are so cost prohibitive are often those that suffer the most from failing ground water supplies and drought,” said Shelton.

There are currently two Self-Help Virginia projects underway in Virginia, expected to benefit more than 150 Virginians.

The Town of Wakefield applied for funding through the Self-Help Virginia program. Water will be provided to the neighborhood through the Town of Wakefield, and sewer services will be administered by the Sussex Service Authority (SSA). SSA also provided most of the equipment necessary for construction - and personnel to operate the equipment.

Funding for this project was provided through Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds that are administered by DHCD. The Self-Help Virginia program involves collaboration between many partners – including state agencies such as DHCD and the Virginia Departments of Health and Environmental Quality, local neighborhood communities like Birch Island Road, local governments such as Wakefield and local utility providers like the Sussex Service Authority.

In 2004, DHCD was awarded a Community Development Excellence Award from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development for the Self-Help Virginia program. The award was one of only 15 given nationwide at HUD’s 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration of the CDBG program.

For more information about Self-Help Virginia, visit: [www.dhcd.virginia.gov](http://www.dhcd.virginia.gov).

DHCD is committed to creating safe, affordable, and prosperous communities to live, work and do business in Virginia. DHCD partners with Virginia’s communities to develop their economic potential, regulates Virginia’s building and fire codes, provides training and certification for building officials and support for Virginia’s homeless, and invests more than \$100 million each year into housing and community development projects throughout the state. By partnering with local governments, nonprofit groups, state and federal agencies, and others, DHCD is working to improve the quality of life for Virginians.



*Norris Eley, project "spark plug"*



